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You Oceans Both

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Abstract

She stood in the doorway, wondering why she was slightly disappointed in what she saw. Everything was as she had left it, except more pronounced...

You Oceans Both

by Lynette Andresen

History, Jr.

You oceans both, I close with you,
We murmur alike reproachfully rolling sands
and drift, knowing not why.

Walt Whitman

SHE STOOD in the doorway, wondering why she was slightly disappointed in what she saw. Everything was as she had left it, except more pronounced. The gold chairs were no longer the chairs by the fireplace, but yellow light bulbs in a dark room. The picture over the fireplace was of three apples, an orange, five bananas, and a bunch of grapes in a wooden bowl. The brown rug was a little too dark, and no longer the unnoticeable softness underfoot. At first sight nothing seemed to blend into the room. All objects were separate individuals. But gradually the feeling of an old acquaintance developed and the room was now Saturday night fires in the fireplace, Carolyn Keene mysteries while curled up in the green-figured quilted chair, popcorn, and T.V.

Cindy continued walking the length of the room and opened the door leading to the patio in the backyard. The briskness of the air accentuated the stuffiness of the house, which was carefully closed to prevent the entrance of the cool ocean wind. She ran down the slight hill across the yard, carefully detouring around the slight depressions of the earth, and slowed to a fast walk as she approached the cliff.

"Hey you, I'm home," she yelled to herself and the unceptive water below as she scanned the horizon of the ocean.

The power of salty coolness pierced through her clothing and opened her pores, as if to extract all evils dwelling below the surface. The farce of college education breezed into the air in the presence of the ocean as naturally as water tumbles down the height of a fall. Her slit eyes viewed the expanse of

the ocean. The nonexistent color and sky-reflected blue met somewhere beyond the limits of her eye. She picked a white-cap within her sight and intently watched it progress to the land till it ended in violent rebellion, stopped by the rocks.

Her eyes spied the sea grass greedily living on the coast of the ocean. Too much ocean would kill it; too little, and it would die. Just enough salt water produced the sharp-edged sheaves clumped here and there on the coast. The ugliness of memories of cut legs was overcome by the beauty of the variety of colors. The greenness of the grass, blueness of the sky, clearness of the water, and brownness of the rocks represented nature's color chart.

How much does this mean to me? How can I say? "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways?" I wish I could meet someone as sensitive and romantic and happy as Browning. How glorious would life be to know the existence of an idea—an idea that encompassed the ultimate of human life.

Cindy looked up into the sky and her eyes outlined the ever lasting end of clouds. *God, why am I looking for an answer that will never exist? If only I were a rag mop guided day by day by a sturdy hand. Cindy, what are you thinking? Join the masses! No never! If only college didn't get in the way of education. Right now—this very minute—I'm learning more than four weeks of college have taught me. But then, of course, it's true I couldn't quote Elizabeth Browning, I couldn't identify the smell of fishing boats with iodine, I couldn't even be frustrated. With school, I look at the ocean and I can say "You beautiful specimen of H₂O." But without education all I know is that the ocean means little twitches in the stomach, wet eyelashes, a powerful heart, and a searching mind.*

Hey, I've got it! With education I can do both. But, hell, if you want to get a certain reaction and you can get it without education, then why be educated? God! I sound like Groucho Marx. I wonder what he's doing. Oh, gees. What a mess.

Cindy walked silently toward the house. Then in a sudden spurt of childish fun, she broke into a run and bounded across the lawn up to the back door. Her slender body seemed

to be carried by the breeze from the ocean. Cindy was beautiful—in her father's words, "Not like the Mona Lisa, but like the ocean." It was not the clearness of her skin or the slight color on her well-formed lips, but her expressive eyes that made her beautiful. They revealed a wonder and power of life that few people know exist.

She walked into the back hallway and ran her hands through her shoulder length, slightly curled hair. Adjusting the pink, handknit sweater over the rose stretch pants, she went into the kitchen and took a chocolate covered doughnut. Cindy poured a glass of milk and stood in front of the kitchen window looking onto the block long driveway.

Wonder where Mother is. Just like her to leave me chocolate doughnuts. Guess I should have called and told her I was going to be home early.

Cindy made a complete circle around the articles in the square room. Her hands skimmed the formica tile of the cabinet tops and the porcelain of the sink, and then jumped a space to continue feeling the enamel of the refrigerator. She looked in every jar on the cabinet. Chocolate chip cookies in the "Rice" jar, tea bags in the "Coffee" jar, and miniature marshmallows in the "Sugar" jar.

Cindy chuckled. *How typical of Mother. Complete orderliness on the outside, but wow! Don't look in the closets. Gee, her face turned to view space, that would make a good cartoon. Too bad I don't know Charles Schultz.*

After she took the final bite of the doughnut, she rinsed her mouth with the rest of the milk.

Wonder where Mother is. Her mind turned to the apprehensive quiet of the house. She returned to the living room and, as if a guest in a girl friend's home, she browsed through the books on the book shelves near the fireplace.

Ian Fleming . . . Hummmm.

Cindy reached for the book and flipped the cover open. *THUNDERBALL by Ian Fleming. What a name!! A stretch of the imagination and THUNDERBALL by I am Flem. How ugly. He reminds me of THE CATCHER AND THE RYE.*

Telephone rings stopped a further inspection of the book. Cindy walked the few feet to the square in the wall where the telephone was hidden and lifted the receiver to

her ear.

"Hello."

"Say, when are you coming to my office?" a man's voice asked.

"What?"

A slight pause followed while both tried to adjust the pieces of a puzzle yet unknown to both.

"Who am I talking to?" he questioned.

"Cindy."

A chuckle reached Cindy's ear.

"Oh, Cindy. This is Al Bowlin. I though you were your mother."

They both laughed a sort of enlarged chuckle.

"Is Mother supposed to be at your office?"

"Yes, we're going to talk about your house. Hey, I think they're walking in right now. Thanks, Cindy. Oh say, how's school?"

"OK. Say, will you tell them I'm home?"

"Sure thing. Bye."

"Adios."

Oh. I did it again. Adios. Darn. I've got to stop that. Wonder why Mom's talking to Al about the house. Maybe she wants to sell that stretch of land. No, that's not about the house. Oh, I know. She wants to build the tool shed she's talked about for years. But I didn't think realtors dealt with building. Doesn't sound reasonable, anyway. Oh, well, can't worry about it. Guess I'll go to "I am Flem." . . .

Mr. Patton sat behind the steering wheel of the '63 Buick Special. His eyes scanned the familiar New England scene. The trees were just turning slight golds and reds and, by comparison, the background of the cloud-illuminated water and gray rocks was drab.

How many years have I seen winter bring death on this road?

"Margaret." He stared at the road and with no inflection asked, "How long have we lived here?"

"Well, let's see. Cindy is eighteen and she was three when we moved in. Must be fifteen years," Mrs. Patton answered almost awed by the expanse of time that had seemed but a grain's drop in the sand clock of time.

"Means I've worked for Blanchards thirty-one years," he calculated.

The tires hugged the road and carried the car toward its garage. The husband and wife were silent. The magnitude of the problem they faced weighed upon their conscience and selfish desires.

"Marge" sliced the heaviness of the quiet. "If you had a son, would you give him the presidency when you retired, even when you knew he wasn't ready for it?"

Marge looked at her husband.

"Earl, I was just thinking about that, too." She paused and looked through the front window. "Yes, I would." And then with more certainty, "I know very well that I would because I'd give Cindy everything I had to give. Even though I'd doubt her preparation now, I'd know that in the future she could handle it."

Earl nodded his head in agreement. "I would, too. Knowing that, I can respect Blanchard even though he's killed a part of me."

"You've got to remember, Earl," his wife continued, "Blanch was counting on you to remain as vice president. He knew you'd carry his son through the period of adjustment."

A slight chuckle came from Earl.

"Old Bowlin was kind of surprised, wasn't he? I suppose the whole town knows by now that I'm retiring and we're moving."

Mrs. Patton wondered at all the gossip that started from Al Bowlin's office. "Yes, I think you're right."

"I'm glad Cindy came home this weekend. Wonder what her big news is. We'll have to tell her our plans, too."

Six minutes later and Cindy was still reading the front cover of the book. She sat on her green quilted chair curled up in a ball. Then, deciding upon the merits of extended legs, she moved the copy of "Harpers" and the vase filled with fall leaves to the other end of the coffee table in front of her. She stretched her legs so that more than just her heels rested on the table. Reclining her head on the back of the chair, she practiced exhaling smoke rings into the air.

Wonder what they'll say. Come to think of it, wonder

what I'll say. I don't know why I run in circles. No, circles are too symmetrical. I run in irregular trapezoids. I'll say, "There's too much to do and life is too short." Gee, I wonder how many days I'll live. Think of all the days I've wasted in chem lab. It makes me sick. "No more lessons, no more books, no more teachers dirty looks. Da da dada da." Cindy accentuated the humming of the familiar verse, tapping her heels on the table.

. . . Hey, that reminds me. Cindy disturbed her well-planned position and walked to the stereo. *Joan Baez. That should move me. Wonder if I'm going to get a guitar for Christmas. Hope so.*

Cindy squashed the end of her now short cigarette in the ash tray and again tackled the complex problem of positioning herself.

Wonder how nervy I should get. I know what I'd love to do. Ho, ho. Wouldn't they just about die? What was that boy's name? Tried the same trick on him. Oh, that was a fun evening.

Cindy slumped in her chair and closed her eyes as she remembered that evening.

Both sat on the edge of the davenport with their arms on their knees supporting their chins. They looked each other in the eye.

"You're lucky you're a boy. If I were you, I'd become an educated bum. I'd hitchhike all over. But what can a girl do?"

The boy acted startled—what can a girl do? "Well, um, you could buy a car and travel and . . ."

"No," she interrupted. "I could buy a motorcycle."

They both laughed at the ridiculous scene that would create.

"No," she continued. "That reminds me of 'Psycho.' Did you see that?"

"Yes."

"I'd be scared I'd end up in the trunk of a car in the bottom of a ravine."

They laughed, shuddering inside at the possibility.

No, I couldn't buy a motorcycle. But I could move to New York. I'd walk down Broadway at midnight. The neon

flashing signs would color the darkness. Taxis filled with play-goers would honk and pass causing litter to rise in the air. I've never been to New York, but I'd like it. I'd sleep till noon and at three o'clock Wednesday afternoons, I'd go to Coney Island. Art galleries would be my second home, with fear of no exams.

Bored with the prospect of only dreaming and slightly fearing what her parents would say, Cindy got up and turned the stereo off. Immediately the distant noise of water lashing the rocks worked its way into the house.

I know what I'm going to do to rid myself of the oppressive seriousness of this house.

Cindy darted into the kitchen where the back closet was. She grabbed her old brown suede jacket from a hanger and flung one arm at a time into it. The high fishing boots were still there and she brought them out and fought the resistance of the rubber of the tennis shoes to push her feet into them.

Completely prepared she opened the back door and was met by the brisk salt air. Cindy walked to the edge of the lawn and started through the haylike grass that led to the water. The boots protected her from the sharp edges of the sea grass and they smoothed the precarious walk over the rocks. At the edge of the wave's length, she paused and looked at the big, flat rock that was in the foot-deep water.

This is my citadel over which I view the funnies of life. The Rock of Gibraltar between me and everything.

She waded to the rock and in one attempt found herself flung onto its surface. *Lucky the waves are low today. The top is dry, just like it's waiting for me.* First the boots came off and then without untying the shoelaces, the tennis shoes joined the boots on the rock. She rolled her slacks up and forced her feet into the ice water below.

Don't know why I always plunge them in so fast. Dad told me it's bad for my heart. Maybe I'll die four seconds early because I plunged my feet into this water so fast. But now they're in and I can be numbed by the desensitizing effect of the cold water.

"Cindy," a voice came from the cliff.

Cindy looked up and saw her father waving his arm. She motioned him to come down and he disappeared from her

sight. Several minutes later Mr. Patton, attired as Cindy, was on the beach.

"Come on out," Cindy invited her father. "There's enough room."

He walked to the edge of the rock and grabbed Cindy's cheeks between his hands and lightly kissed her forehead. "How's my girl?"

"Don't know, Dad. Four weeks of college have turned me inside out. How's your life?"

"Well," he chuckled. "We've got some news for you."

"Good." She clapped her hands to express her enthusiasm. "What?"

"I'm retiring."

"You're what?" Cindy asked.

"Retiring. Your mother and I are going to move to New York."

All of a sudden the pieces fit neatly into place. Cindy's mood changed from a childish flirt to an unbelieving young adult.

"That's why Al called this morning!"

"Probably. We met with him this morning. He's going to sell the house. Now, what is your news?"

Cindy's mind was detached from any human ties. She couldn't imagine home without this setting, this water. Tears clouded her vision and she blinked an unnatural number of times to keep the tears from spreading to her cheeks.

"I'm going to New York, too," she answered, not really remembering if that was the answer to the question he had asked.

"Why?"

"I'm going to New York and work somewhere." Her eyes were focused on an unseen object on the horizon. Her comments were to herself, her father a mere object with no response.

"You unhappy at school?"

Cindy turned from the object and herself and looked at the man next to her.

"Unhappy? No, not really. But college is stopping my education."

"You want to conquer the world, don't you Cindy? I just wish I could relive just one of the days in my youth. Maybe

then I'd have enough energy to work. I wanted to go to New York a long time ago. I was going to go and write plays. Sounds silly, doesn't it? I can't even write a decent letter. But I was going to be another Shakespeare. I wasn't going to wear white shirts and ties to church every Sunday. I was going to the wharves and watch ships come in. Oh, the fun I was going to have. But you know why I didn't Cindy? Because my father said, 'And what are you going to do after you've seen all the ships?' "

"When I have seen and heard and done everything I want to do in life, then I will die."

"Look at the sea, kitten. The waves try again and again to conquer more of the land it is stopped by. Yet, look at the little progress it has made. It will never end. It says in its monotonous precision, 'If I don't quit pounding those rocks into nothing, I'll be a stagnant pool of water.' Cindy, each little wave doesn't do much when it thrashes the shore, but it says, 'I'm going to try to do better than any other wave.' It knows that it probably won't wet one more grain of sand, but at least it tried."

Quiet between the two people lasted a few moments as they watched wave after wave. Finally, Cindy broke the silence.

"Why are you retiring then?"

"Cindy, you're young. The young never really understand the old. But I'll tell you why just as my heart tells me why." His eyes concentrated on his invisible object in space. "I'm tired, Cindy. I've lived my life. I've worked hard, and I can't work anymore. I've reached my final step. I'll be v.p. as long as I stay. Blanch's son is the new president."

More than ever before Cindy wished she had the maturity to answer her father.

"Dad, does a wave need to go to college to make a good try?"

After a moment of consideration, he answered, "Yes. Because college makes him aware that the try must be made. It makes him realize the extent of the ocean and what it contains."

"Aren't you a wave?"

"Yes."

"We'd make the world stagnant, wouldn't we?"

Her father chuckled and nodded in agreement.

"Earl, Earl," Mrs. Patton yelled from the cliff. The two looked up and saw Mrs. Patton wave her arm for them to come.

"Wonder what she wants," Cindy questioned.

"I know. Al is here. He was coming over to settle the last details."

Cindy reached for her tennis shoes and started to untie the shoelaces. Her father's hand reached out and put them back on the rock.

"I don't have anything I want to say to him. Do you?" Cindy shook her head. "Then let's not go up."

They looked up to watch Mrs. Patton disappear toward the house. Then they looked at each other and smiled at their discovery. Cindy plunged her feet back into the water and waited for the water to feel not so cold.

Father

by Jane Johnson

English, Sr.

Sunday: I sit and watch him go to praise
the Lord in truth. His simple clothes are torn
from toil; the brimmed old hat has yearly borne
the sweat of summer planting and harvest days.
The barn, his church of birth and hope, displays
the peace of a night long past. His tithe is corn
in burdened buckets; his choir is birds newborn
this day. My Father knows just what to praise.

In churches down the road the china doll
society sits, pious row on row,
just mouthing words for others to see. Then flee
to shatter worthless vows they've made and fall
to nothing. I view them all, my face aglow,
for He, and Father I see, praise honestly.